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AUTHOR McGowan, John R.
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ABSTRACT

While the relationship between stressful life events, social support, and health outcomes has received much attention, efforts to quantify social support and directly examine specific ameliorative effects have resulted in mixed findings. Direct and mediational effects of two psychometrically validated measures of perceived and received social support on both positive and negative psychological functioning were compared in a group of college students (N=97). Subjects completed the Langner Psychiatric Screening Inventory, the Beck Depression Inventory, the Affect Balance Scale, a version of the Quality of Life Scale, and two measures of perceived and received social support: the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List and the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behavior. These measures and the College Student Life Event Scale were administered at two measurement periods separated by an 8-week interval. Analyses based on a multivariate hierarchical regression model revealed that perceived social support was strongly predictive of psychological status independent of initial psychological status, negative life events, or social loss life events. Received social support had extremely limited predictive power. Social non-loss life events, but not social loss life events, were also found to strongly relate to psychological status. (Author/NRB)

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Social Support, Social Loss and Positive and Negative Psychological Functioning

John R. McGowan

Roswell Park Memorial Institute

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An expanded version of this manuscript is in preparation. For copies write: John R. McGowan, Ph.D., RPMI, Dept. of Psychology, 666 Elm St., Buffalo, N.Y. 14263.

Abstract

This investigation examined the influence of perceived social support, received social support, and social loss life events on positive and negative psychological functioning. College students were employed in a prospective design and analyses were based on a multivariate hierarchical regression model. There was little evidence for a stress-buffering effect of social support. However, perceived social support was found to be strongly predictive of psychological status independent of initial psychological status, negative life events, or social loss life events. Social non-loss life events, but not social loss life events, were also found to strongly relate to psychological status.

Social Support, Social Loss and Positive and Negative Psychological Functioning

While the relationship between stressful life events, social support, and health outcomes has received much recent attention, efforts to quantify social support and directly examine specific ameliorative effects have resulted in mixed findings (see Heller & Swindle, 1983). It has been argued that the difficulty in explicating the impact of social support on psychological distress is due, in large part, to discrepent conceptualization and measurement of the construct. Briefly, structural measures of social support (e.g. actual support received) do not adequately capture many important qualitative factors (e.g. appropriateness, reciprocity) that are implicitely weighed in making appraisals of one's level of perceived social support. Thus, measures of perceived support may more accurately reflect the true impact of social support on an individual. In addition, this lack of clarity in conceptualization contributes to the continuing controversy over whether social support exerts a direct (main) effect on psychological functioning or whether social support buffers (interaction) the deleterious impact of stressful life events. Finally, it has been argued that measures of stressful life events and social support are badly confounded in that many of the most stressful life events explicitely or implicitely entail a loss of social supports (Thoits, 1982). This confound potentially obscures the relative influences of life stress and social support on health outcomes.

To address these issues, the present study compared the direct and mediational effects of two psychometrically validated measures of perceived and received social support on both positive and negative psychological functioning. The effects of loss and non-loss life events were separately assessed and the influence of social support was examined with and without

controlling for the effects of social loss life events. College students were employed in a short-term prospective design and analyses were based on a multivariate hierarchical regression model with an exact least squares solution. This model assesses the independent effects of each predictor (main effects and interactions) on all criteria as a whole, as well as each criteria separately.

Methods

Subjects

Subjects were 97 undergraduate students (51 males; 46 females).

Procedure

Subjects were group administered the Langner Psychiatric Screening Inventory (L-22), the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), the Affect Balance Scale (NABS=negative affect; PABS=positive affect), and the abridged version of the Quality of Life Scale (QOL). They also completed two measures of perceived and received social support; the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) and the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behavior (ISSB), respectively. These measures and the College Student Life Event Scale (CSLES) were administered at two measurement periods, separated by an eight week interval. At Time 1, subjects reported the occurrence and valance (positive or negative) of life events experienced in the last year. At Time 2 they reported the occurrence and valance of events experienced during the Time 1-Time 2 interval. A separate sample was utilized to classify life events as loss or non-loss.

Results

Time 1 Findings. The ISEL was significantly correlated with the ISSB and each were highly correlated with the QOL and PABS measures of psychological well-being. Multivariate hierarchical regression tested the independent main

effects of both social support scales and any social support x negative event interaction. There was a significant multivariate main effect for the ISEL ($p<.001$). Univariate regression revealed that the ISEL significantly related (positively) to the QOL, PABS and L-22 and related negatively to the BDI. There was a near significant multivariate ISEL x negative events interaction ($p<.06$). Univariate analysis revealed a significant interaction on the L-22 and BDI distress measures that, when graphed, fit a buffering model.

The multivariate main effect for the ISSB was also significant ($p<.05$) with a significant univariate effect only on the PABS. The multivariate ISSB x negative events interaction approached significance ($p<.06$) with significant univariate effects on the L-22 and BDI, though these interactions did not fit a buffering model.

Time 2 Analysis. The correlational pattern was extremely similar to those found at Time 1. Multivariate regression analysis found a significant main effect for the ISEL ($p<.001$). Univariate results found the ISEL to significantly relate positively to the PABS and QOL and negatively to the L-22, BDI and NABS. Neither the social support x negative event interactions nor ISSB main effects proved significant.

Prospective Analyses. The Time 2 multivariate regression were repeated entering the five Time 1 psychological status measures as a first-step predictor. There continued to be a significant multivariate main effect for the ISEL ($p<.05$) with significant univariate effects on the BDI, L-22, PABS, and QOL. Neither the multivariate social support x negative event interactions nor the ISSB main effects proved significant. To assess the unique effects of social support each social support regression was repeated, entering the number of loss life events as a first step predictor. The regression results were unchanged, indicating that social support exerts an

independent effect on psychological status.

Social Loss Events

Based on independent ratings, life events were characterized as loss or non-loss. Multivariate regression analysis found a significant main effect ($p<.01$) for negative non-loss, but not negative loss events, with univariate effects on the L-22, BDI, NABS, and QOL. There was a significant multivariate main effect for positive non-loss events, with significant univariate effects on the QOL and PABS. At Time 2 there continued to be a significant multivariate main effect for negative non-loss events ($p<.001$) with significant univariate effects on the L-22, BDI, PABS, and QOL. Similarly, the multivariate main effect for positive non-loss events proved significant ($p<.05$), with significant univariate effects on the PABS and QOL. The prospective analysis (controlling for initial psychological status) found a significant multivariate main effect only for negative non-loss life events ($p<.001$) with univariate effects on the BDI, L-22, and QOL.

Discussion

Perceived social support (ISEL) was a strong predictor of psychological status both cross sectionally and prospectively. Moreover, ISEL was found to significantly predict changes in psychological status, independent of the influence of negative life events, social loss events, or initial psychological status. In contrast, received social support (ISSB) had extremely limited predictive power. These results are consistant with recent investigations (Cohen et al., in press; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983) that underscore the ameliorative properties of subjective appraisals of social support. Notable was the strong positive correlations between ISEL, ISSB, and positive life events, suggesting that perceived social support may be built upon receipt of recent support from others and the experience of recent

positive life events.

There was limited evidence for a buffering effect for social support, with significant findings only at Time 1 on the ISEL. It is of interest that the ISSB interactions, when obtained, did not fit a buffering model, but found increased social support to be associated with increased distress for low stress subjects. These findings provide evidence that social demands can outweigh the benefits of social support under some circumstances.

Life events that also entailed the loss of social supports were negatively correlated with both social support measures, providing some evidence of concurrent validity. However, negative loss events were found to be generally unrelated to psychological distress. These findings are in contrast to two large scale retrospective investigations that found loss events to preceed the onset of depression (Brown & Harris, 1979, Paykel, 1981). However, negative non-loss life events were strongly related to subsequent psychological status in the prospective analysis. These findings indicate that the effects of life stress are not due solely to a disruption of social support. Rather, negative life experience appear to have a independent influence on subsequent psychological status.

Table 1

Intercorrelations : Time 1 with Time 2 Measures

	Negative Events	Positive Events	ISEL	ISSB	CM	L-22	BDI	NABS	PABS	QOL
Negative Events	.41[c]	.16	-.22[a]	.18[a]	-.19[a]	.39[c]	.40[c]	.32[c]	-.12	-.13
Positive Events		.47[c]	.28[b]	.39[c]	.18[a]	.11	.06	.16	.21[a]	.30[b]
ISEL			.82[c]	.46[c]	.12	-.22[a]	-.17[a]	-.03	.45[c]	.59[c]
ISSB				.76[c]	.04	.13	.08	.17[a]	.21[a]	.34[c]
CM					.82[c]	-.35[c]	-.26[b]	-.31[c]	.15	.53[c]
L-22						.72[c]	.46[c]	.41[c]	-.02	-.33[c]
BDI							.64[c]	.32[c]	-.16	-.35[c]
NABS								.52[c]	-.02	-.23[b]
PABS									.68[c]	.53[c]
QOL										.85[c]

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

Table 2

Intercorrelations : Time 1 Measures

	Positive Events	ISEL	ISSB	M-C	L-22	BDI	NABS	PABS	QOL
Negative Events	.31[c]	-.25[b]	.16	-.21[a]	.40[c]	.60[c]	.39[c]	-.09	-.18[a]
Positive Events		.25[b]	.29[b]	.24[b]	.04	.04	.13	.33[c]	.37[c]
ISEL			.47[c]	.24[b]	-.30[b]	-.40[c]	-.10	.63[c]	.72[c]
ISSB				.06	.10	.07	.19[a]	.45[c]	.40[c]
Marlowe-Crowne					-.42[c]	-.38[c]	-.40[c]	.17[a]	.48[c]
L-22						.76[c]	.65[c]	-.26[b]	-.41[c]
BDI							.49[c]	-.31[c]	-.46[c]
NABS								.09	-.20[c]
PABS									.58[c]

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

Table 3

Intercorrelations : Time 2 Measures

	Positive Events	ISEL	ISSB	M-C	L-22	BDI	NABS	PABS	QOL
Negative Events	.49[c]	-.02	-.01	-.23[a]	.40[c]	.49[c]	.34[c]	.04	-.12
Positive Events		.27[b]	.26[b]	-.07	.05	-.04	.24[b]	.30[c]	.29[b]
ISEL			.47[c]	.30[b]	-.30[b]	-.31[c]	-.09	.52[c]	.77[c]
ISSB				.09	.03	-.02	.06	.32[c]	.38[c]
Marlowe-Crowne					-.32[c]	-.23[a]	-.39[c]	.03	.45[c]
L-22						.73[c]	.56[c]	-.18[a]	-.42[c]
BDI							.45[c]	-.16	-.44[c]
NABS								.02	-.21[a]
PABS									.55[c]

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

Figure 1

Loss Life Events and Reported Occurrence Rate

	Time 1%	Time 2%
Death of close relative (parent or sibling) (86)[a]	9.3	1.0
Marital separation/divorce (85)	4.1	2.1
Death of friend (83)	14.4	4.1
Terminated intimate relationship (78)	53.6	19.6
Personal rejection by close friend/lover (76)	39.2	25.8
Chose to terminate close relationship (71)	21.7	12.4
Separation from close friend due to moving (70)	50.5	12.4
Relationship with spouse worsened (69)	1.0	2.1
Withdrawal from college (68)	3.1	2.1
Decreased number of friends (67)	16.5	10.3
Increased separation from children (66)	3.1	4.1
Separation from parents and siblings (66)	63.9	28.9
Began or increased use of illicit drugs (65)	8.2	10.3
Loss of pet through death or runaway (64)	10.3	7.2
Parents separated or divorced (62)	5.2	1.0
Serious conflict with roommate(61)	24.0	24.0
Relationship with relative worsened (60)	16.5	12.4
Fired or lost job	5.2	0
Relationship with lover worsened (56)	36.1	23.7
Had an abortion; girlfriend/wife had an abortion (54)	1.0	3.1
Transferred to new school (53)	8.2	2.1
Problem with the law (arrested, detained etc.) (53)	10.3	5.2
Increased use of alcohol (51)	34.0	24.0

[a]Percentage of independent sample who endorsed item as definitely entailing a loss or severance of social ties.

Figure 2

Prospective Regression Analysis of Time 2 Psychological Status on Time 2 Positive and Negative Loss and Non-Loss Events

Predictor	Criterion	df	F	% Variance
Negative loss events	L-22	1,78	.33	.15
	BDI	1,78	.00	.00
	NABS	1,78	4.29[a]	3.41
	PABS	1,78	2.00	1.39
	QOL	1,78	.25	.10
Positive non-loss events	L-22	1,78	.10	.45
	BDI	1,78	.00	.00
	NABS	1,78	.35	.28
	PABS	1,78	.44	.31
	QOL	1,78	2.45	1.03
Negative non-loss events	L-22	1,78	4.66[a]	11.35
	BDI	1,78	24.48[c]	11.35
	NABS	1,78	.17	.14
	PABS	1,78	3.49	2.43
	QOL	1,78	12.59[c]	5.31
Positive loss events	L-22	1,78	1.63	.75
	BDI	1,78	.10	.04
	NABS	1,78	2.24	1.78
	PABS	1,78	.00	.00
	QOL	1,78	1.67	.71
Positive X Negative loss events	L-22	1,77	.09	.04
	BDI	1,77	3.00	1.36
	NABS	1,77	.77	.62
	PABS	1,77	.28	.19
	QOL	1,77	.03	.01

Note. Each predictor has been tested after partialling the effects of Time 1 psychological status

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

Figure 3

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Time 1 Psychological Status on Time 1 Positive and Negative Loss and Non-Loss Life Events

Predictor	Criterion	df	F	% Variance
Negative loss events	L-22	1,83	2.06	2.04
	BDI	1,83	6.50[a]	5.21
	NABS	1,83	.66	.65
	PABS	1,83	.31	.34
	QOL	1,83	.52	.47
Positivenon-loss events	L-22	1,83	.05	.05
	BDI	1,83	1.85	1.48
	NABS	1,83	.20	.20
	PABS	1,83	3.70	4.01
	QOL	1,83	14.47[c]	12.99
Negativenon-loss events	L-22	1,83	5.[illegible][a]	5.60
	BDI	1,83	11.6[illegible][c]	9.35
	NABS	1,83	8.48[b]	8.30
	PABS	1,83	2.92	3.17
	QOL	1,83	8.72[b]	7.83
Positive loss events	L-22	1,83	.05	.05
	BDI	1,83	.00	.00
	NABS	1,83	.38	.37
	PABS	1,83	.04	.04
	QOL	1,83	1.47	1.32
Positive X Negative loss events	L-22	1,82	2.14	2.09
	BDI	1,82	2.74	2.15
	NABS	1,82	2.03	1.97
	PABS	1,82	2.44	2.60
	QOL	1,82	4.06[a]	3.51

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

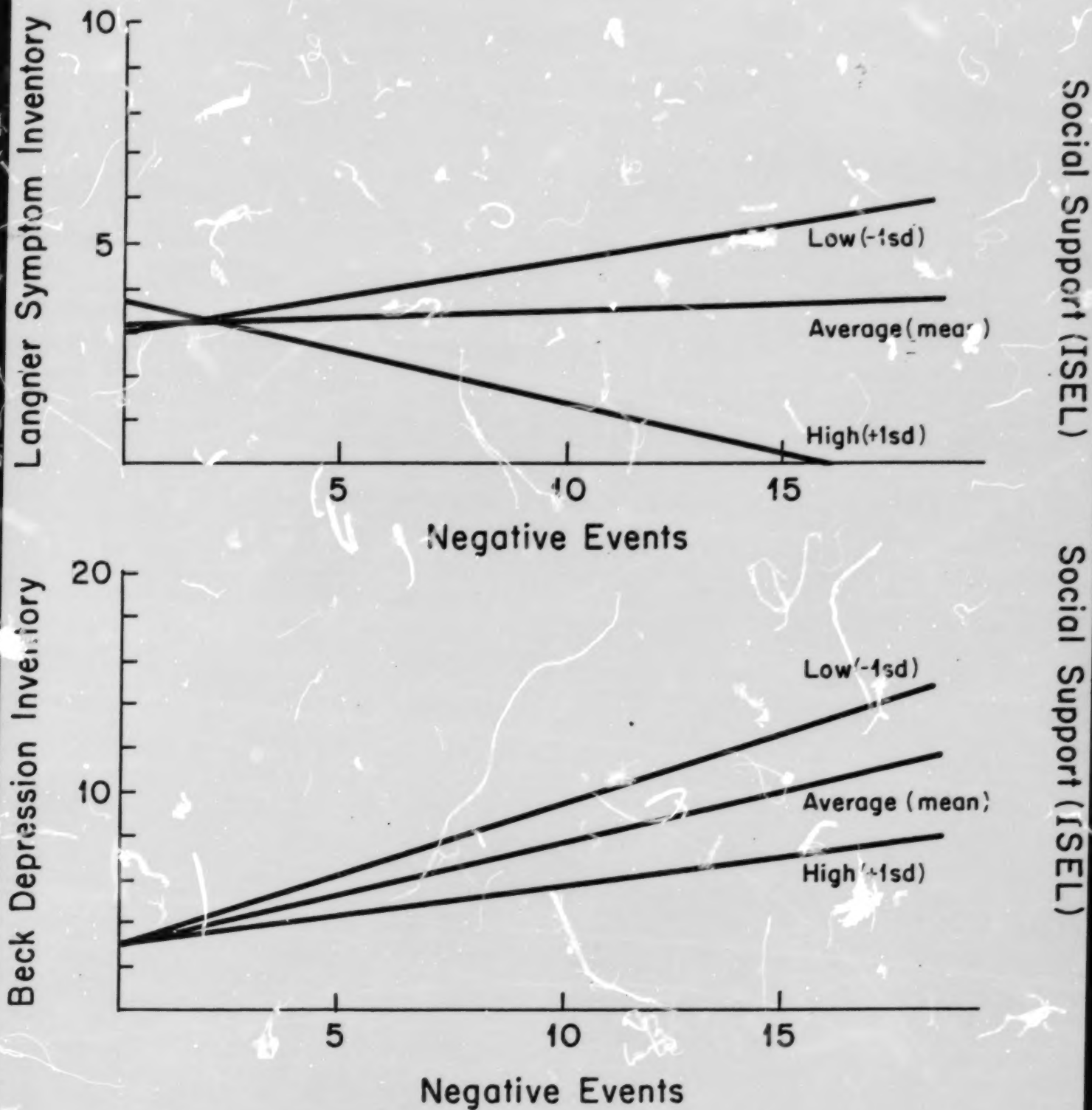
Figure 4

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Time 2 Psychological Status on Time 2 Positive and Negative Loss and Non-Loss Life Events

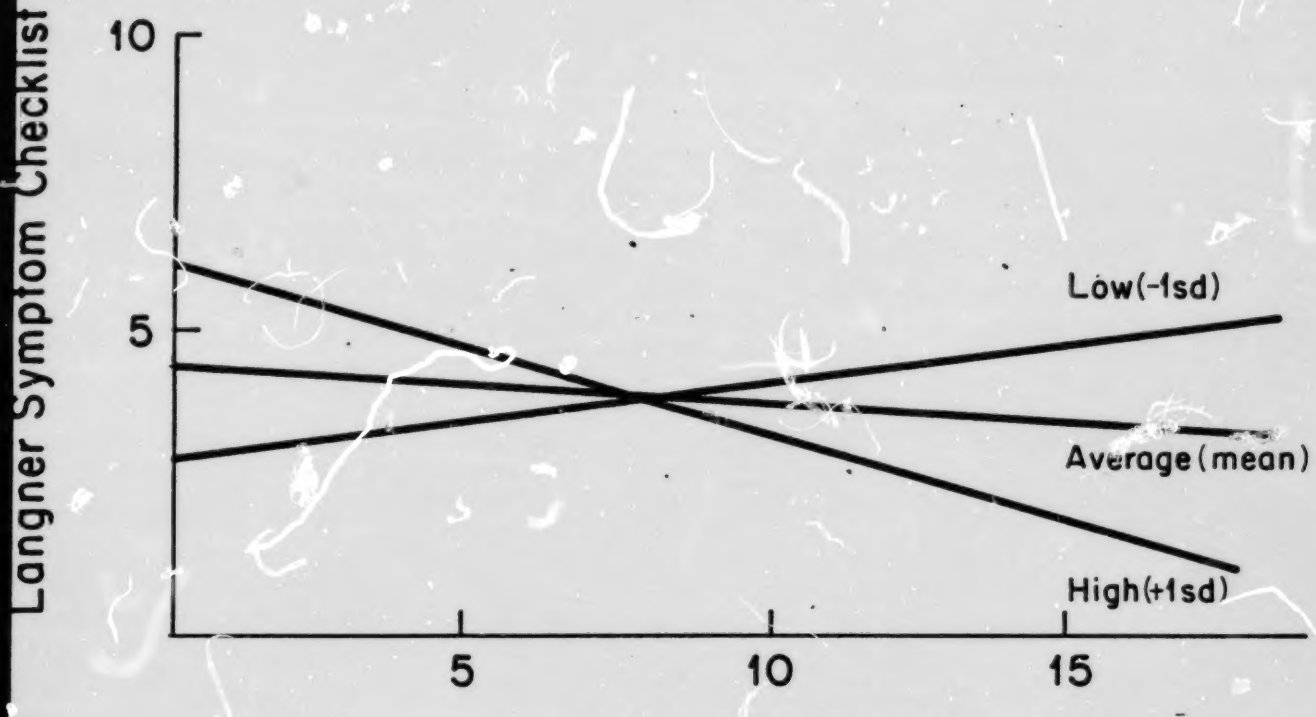
Predictor	Criterion	df	F	% Variance
Negative loss events	L-22	1,83	.38	.38
	BDI	1,83	.02	.02
	NABS	1,83	2.90	2.90
	PABS	1,83	.20	.22
	QOL	1,83	.01	.01
Positive non-loss events	L-22	1,83	.09	.09
	BDI	1,83	.03	.02
	NABS	1,83	.69	.71
	PABS	1,83	5.81[a]	6.07
	QOL	1,83	5.05[a]	4.44
Negative non-loss events	L-22	1,83	10.60[b]	10.72
	BDI	1,83	38.93[c]	29.81
	NABS	1,83	2.71	2.80
	PABS	1,83	6.65[a]	6.95
	QOL	1,83	24.63[c]	21.69
Positive loss events	L-22	1,83	.00	.00
	BDI	1,83	.03	.02
	NABS	1,83	1.06	1.09
	PABS	1,83	.09	.09
	QOL	1,83	.52	.46
Positive X Negative loss events	L-22	1,82	1.17	1.18
	BDI	1,82	.07	.05
	NABS	1,82	.01	.01
	PABS	1,82	.64	.67
	QOL	1,82	.46	.41

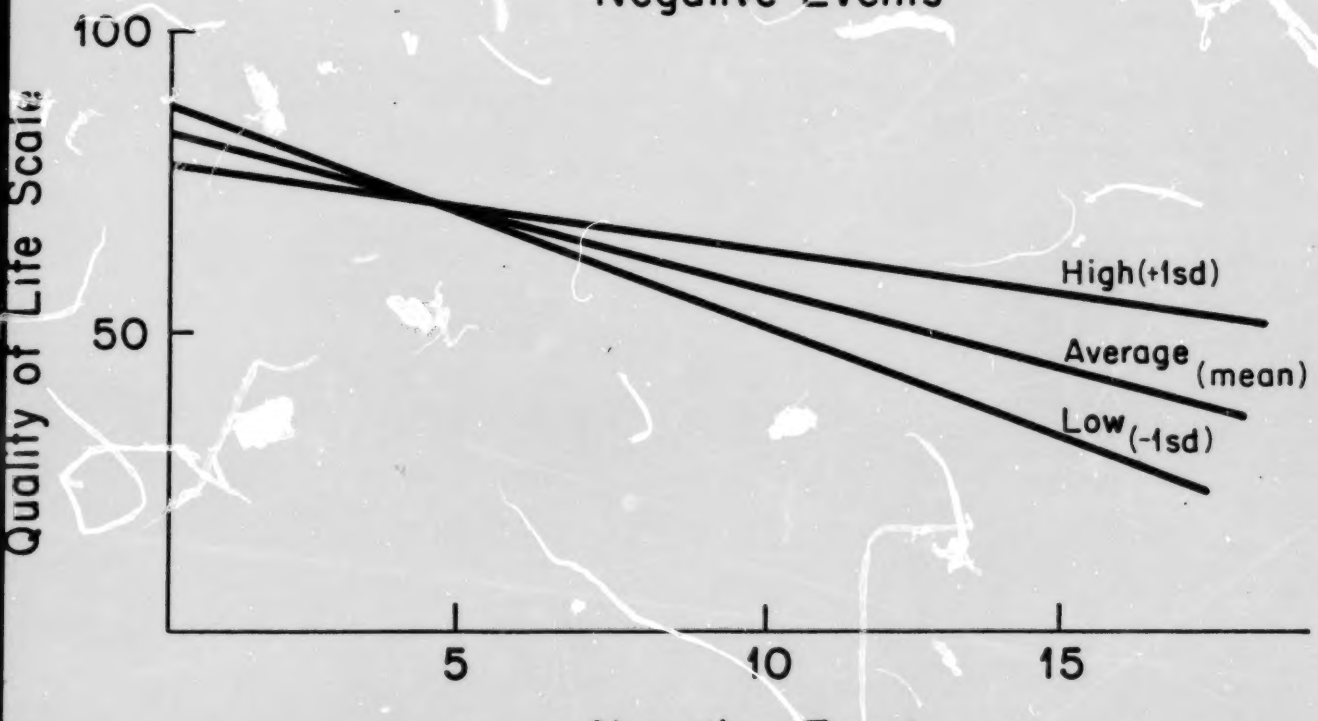
[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

Regression of Time 1 BDI and L-22 on Time 1 Negative Life Events For Low, Average, and High Social Support Values



Regression of Time 1 L-22 and QOL on Time 1 Negative Life Events For Low, Average, and High Social Support Values





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